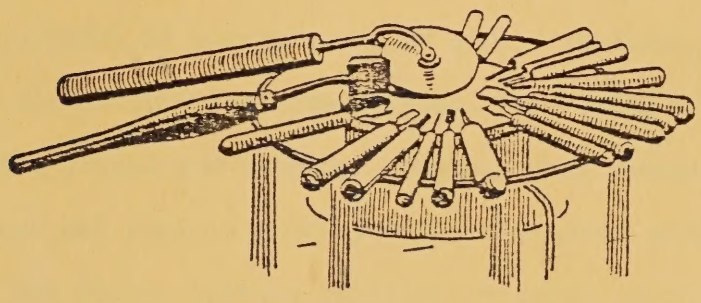
CONSERVATION in the FISHER LIBRARY



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THE THOMAS FISHER
RARE BOOK LIBRARY

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

The Conservation of Library Materials in the Fisher Library

The Department of Rare Books and Special Collections (now the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library) was established at the University of Toronto in 1955. It began with only a small number of valuable books and manuscripts already in the possession of the University Library. In the succeeding twenty five years, the collection has grown - by selection of books from the main library's stacks, by purchase and by gift - to about 3,000 shelf feet of manuscripts and 200,000 individual items, consisting of books, pamphlets, maps, broadsides, prints and drawings, photographs, newspapers and papyri.

Such a large and rapidly growing collection poses many conservation problems. The new Fisher Library building, occupied since 1973, fortunately has the benefit of an air-conditioning system which offers some air cleaning and temperature and humidity control. The Conservation Section, which at one time had the use of two tables in the middle of the typing pool, is now housed in a well-equipped, pleasant room with 600 square feet of floor space and an additional storage area. The conservation staff consists of a full time book conservator/restorer and his assistant. In the last ten years, about 400 books have been fully restored and several thousand items have received one or more forms of treatment, whether it be a major or minor repair, deacidification, encapsulation or the provision of an acid-free case or box. With the available staff and money, it is simply not possible to treat all the items that need attention and so it is essential that priorities be set. This in itself is a difficult and complicated matter. Choices have continually to be made between the conflicting need for time to deal with such items as rapidly deteriorating paper issues of recent "underground" newspapers (the Fisher

Library has a unique collection) and a seventeenth century book with its leather binding totally destroyed.

This exhibition, arranged by Emrys Evans, attempts to portray the extent of the problem and the different treatments that are available and are used in the Fisher Library, and to show some examples of items properly and beautifully restored and preserved.

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Case 1: The Extent of the Problem

Items shown in this case are representative only of the many items in the collection in a similar condition. They also indicate the great variety of problems which faces the conservator, whether it be broken bindings; leather and cloth in various states of decay; fire, water, mould and insect damaged material; or brittle paper, especially prevalent in items produced since 1850, affecting many books, manuscripts, newspapers and photographs.

1. The 'brittle paper' problem - some examples of the kinds of items that are affected.

2. Leather rotted beyond saving must be removed and eventually replaced. Broken down cloth bindings and sewing structures must be repaired, re-sewn and restored.

3. An extreme example of insect attack.

4. Two examples showing dry rot and mould, both the result of water damage.

5. Fragile and fine bindings to be housed in custom made protective boxes to provide protection from light, dust and abrasion.

6. An ill-conceived binding, which shows damage caused by binding in the numerous fold-out maps at the back of this book.

Case 2: Use and Abuse

Even normally careful handling of books produces some damage which cannot always be avoided. Other causes of damage which can sometimes be eliminated, or at least reduced, include too much light and heat; too much or too little humidity; well-intentioned but unsuccessful amateur repairs of all kinds; any use of adhesive tape; and unofficial "inserts" in books, such as flowers, leaves, human hair, and newspaper clippings. In addition, many recently published new books, including most paperbacks, are "perfect bound", an inappropriate term for a book whose pages consist of separate sheets glued together with one of a variety of plastic adhesives, rather than sewn together in sections. These adhesives are often so unsuitable and unsuccessful that pages soon become loose and separated.

1. Adhesive tapes of all kinds do more damage than good and should be avoided at all costs.

2. Some modern book production methods cause problems for the conservator. This 1977 'perfect bound' book is already falling apart.

3. Some items found in books. Dead insects, droppings, hair, dirt and dust get into books accidentally. Many items are placed in books deliberately, however, including flowers, letters, newspaper cuttings, paper clips, and as shown here, a piece of fresh snake skin. Many books suffer serious disfigurements such as stains and rust marks because of these practices.

4. Damage caused by the ultra violet component of natural and artificial light can be devastating, as these examples show.

5. Four books showing typical amateur approaches to the problem of deteriorating bindings and dust jackets. Adhesive tapes have again been used, adding more damage and hours of work to the processes of repair and restoration.

Case 3: How A Book Is Made

In order to appreciate the problems facing a book conservator, it is necessary to understand how a book is put together. Case 3 shows the construction of a book, from the gathering of loose sections or signatures to the covering of the boards and their decoration. With some variations arising from country of origin and date, the methods of construction illustrated here can be traced back to the fifteenth century and even earlier. Sections were traditionally sewn on raised or recessed cords; books were then rounded and backed; boards were laced on; and headbands were sewn for extra strength and for appearance. Finally the boards were covered and decorated.

1. 'Raised cord' technique sewing structure.

2. 'Recessed cord' technique.

3. After the sewn sections have received a thin layer of adhesive and have been shaped by rounding and backing, the boards are prepared, holed and slotted ready for attachment.

4. After attachment of boards, the book is held in the laying press and the head and tail bands are made. Shown here is a two-colour silk head band being sewn over a core of vellum and leather. Photographs show various other 'forwarding' operations such as back-cornering of boards, the cutting out and paring of leather, pressing, gold finishing and the finished product.

Case 4: Restored and Rebound Books

Many of the books acquired by the Fisher Library are in poor physical

condition, with the original covers missing or so completely deteriorated as to be unusable. In these circumstances, after the necessary restoration of the pages, new covers will be supplied, appropriate to the book's country of origin and date. Many of the marbled and decorative papers shown in this case were produced in the Fisher Library's workshop. The tools used to decorate and letter the covers are from the Birdsall collection of binding tools.

1. Islamic style with triangular protective flap. Bound in Oasis Nigerian goatskin with wood block paste paper sides; blind tooling.

2. Full bound calfskin over five raised cords with gold and blind tooling.

3. Full bound Oasis Nigerian goatskin over four raised cords with gold tooling.

4. Quarter bound Oasis Nigerian goatskin over five raised cords with Cockerell marbled paper sides.

5. Quarter bound Oasis Nigerian goatskin over three raised cords with hand stained paper sides.

Flat Case: New Bindings

The Fisher Library houses many books which have been carefully and beautifully restored, but it also contains examples of the modern bookbinder's art. In this case we exhibit some modern bindings executed by Emrys Evans, the Fisher Library's book conservator/restorer; Michael Wilcox, a Canadian free-lance bookbinder who has also been doing restoration work for the Fisher Library on the Hannah Collection since 1975; and Douglas Duncan, a Toronto art collector, bibliophile and bookbinder, who died in 1968.

Cases 5-7: Treatment

These cases display a number of the different processes used in preservation and restoration.

Case 5

1. Volume dated 1898 shows extremely brittle paper. A Xerox copy or a microfilm is produced where the original is beyond public use.

2. and 3. When books are acquired by or transferred to the Fisher Library from other libraries, the old, unsightly and often damaging spine labels and book pockets are carefully removed.

4. Various solid and powdered erasers are used in the dry cleaning of newspapers, prints, maps etc. The two glass saucers show the cleaning powder before and after cleaning the area indicated by the arrow.

5. Folded maps are removed from their covers, cleaned, washed, sometimes bleached, deacidified using magnesium bicarbonate solution, repaired, backed and encapsulated between clear polyester film.

6. Photographs show a map before and after treatment. In this case a bleaching treatment has been used to remove the unsightly stain.

7. Acrylic coated lens tissue (heat sensitive) is made and used for local repairs.

Case 6

1. A 16th century volume (lacking its original spine) has been completely taken down, cleaned, re-sewn and covered, saving as much as possible of the original material. New material consists of linen cords and thread, paper repairs to signature folds, new leather on spine, board corners and clasp straps. New brass clasps will also be made.

2. Dry leather bindings are treated with various dressings. The arrow indicates before and after treatment.

3. This volume has been cleaned, washed, bleached, deacidified, repaired and rebound. The bottoms of the pages still show stains from mould damage. Arrows show repairs to corners of pages, and also an example of before and after bleaching.

4. The 'University of Toronto Charter' on vellum during treatment for flattening. Now housed in the University of Toronto Archives.

5. Three volumes restored. From left to right -

   a. Old leather lifted to receive matching calfskin repairs on spine and corners; also the top clasp has a new leather/vellum flap inserted.

   b. Completely new leather spine, saving the original lettering piece, also new leather corners under old.

   c. Completely new leather spine with old spine replaced, also new leather corners under old. Arrows indicate new leather.

6. Photographs show "before" and "after" the complete restoration of a 17th century 'full calf' binding. Also a volume with a leather spine and lacquered covers where rotted leather has been replaced and gold-tooled to match original.

Case 7

1. Items from the Juvenile Theatre collection which were tangled and damaged when stored in their original envelopes, now held apart between polyester folders and housed in storage boxes.

2. Scrap books. Newspaper clippings, letters etc. are removed from their old and acidic pages and deacidified.

3. Bookjackets before and after treatment. They are cleaned, deacidified and repaired.

4. Adhesive tapes and their sticky residues are removed.

5. Broken inside joints. Original flyleaves and board papers are lifted to receive new paper or linen joints.

6. Volumes damaged by fire, before and after treatment. The white areas on top of the pages of the restored item show new paper repairs.

7. Papyrus Collection.
Limited repairs made with new papyrus are used to hold the original together. One photograph shows that even treasures dating back 2000 years suffer damage from adhesive tape repairs.

Case 8: Protective Cases

A variety of different protective cases are shown, which are custom made to hold their contents as snugly as possible. These cases offer protection from dust, light and abrasion, and their value should not be underestimated.

Reading Room Cases

The four corner cases in the 1st floor Reading Rooms present brief information about commercially available archival products, environmental

control and disaster contingency plans, and show various publications relating to conservation.

Emrys Evans

Alan Horne